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The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

Letter dated 15 January 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I would like to draw to your attention the report of the environmental assessment mission led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to fire affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region (see A/61/696, annex). The report derives from the requirements of resolution 60/285 on the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, adopted at the 98th plenary meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, held on 7 September 2006.

As you are surely aware, last summer the Azerbaijani delegation, using distorted and inaccurate facts, raised the issue of fires along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh under the appropriate agenda item of the General Assembly. Trying to politicize the natural phenomenon, which usually occurs in this region in summertime, the Azerbaijani delegation groundlessly accused the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh of deliberately setting fires that allegedly caused a significant damage exclusively to the territory of Azerbaijan. That report demonstrates, however, that these allegations prove to be completely unfounded and have nothing to do with the real situation on the ground. Some essential highlights presented below could be helpful in reconstructing the real picture of the events.

First, the report clearly says that the wildfires have affected both sides of the line of contact, inflicting serious environmental and economic damage to both the territory of Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Second, the report points out that the satellite-based images of the region provided by the Azerbaijani side were selective and incomplete. In particular, they deliberately excluded the areas burned further west of the line of contact.

Third, contrary to the claims of the Azerbaijani side, the OSCE mission has determined that the fires that could have reached abandoned villages did not cause significant additional damages to the structure that had already suffered from the conflict.

Fourth, the report reveals that the assessment team was not given the opportunity to visit installations located East of the line of contact. Meanwhile,

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according to the report, the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh provided the OSCE team with full access to visit all sites necessary for the accomplishment of the mission.

Fifth, the report recommends the implementation of joint efforts and cooperation between the sides to address the consequences of fires and prevent their reoccurrences in the future. This philosophy of confidence-building, which has so far been completely rejected by the Azerbaijani side, has always been advocated by Armenia. We believe that the peace process will significantly benefit from the review by Azerbaijan of its counterproductive approach in the light of the recommendations provided by the report.

We kindly request you to have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 17.

(*Signed*) Armen **Martirosyan**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of the
Republic of Armenia to the United Nations